

VIMS Juvenile Fish Survey
Net Notes
September 2009

Throughout the year, the VIMS Juvenile Fish Trawl Survey encounters interesting and sometimes unusual fishes that are part of the local fish assemblage but not well known to the general public. During the Trawl Survey's September sampling round the survey scientists encountered such a species: longnose gar. Longnose gar are a common year round resident of all major Chesapeake Bay tributaries but are most often captured by the Trawl Survey in the warm water months. They are a primitive species characterized by an elongate cylindrical body covered with rough bony scales and a long beaklike snout housing an enormous amount of very sharp teeth. Longnose gar tend to be greenish in color with a pale belly and large black spots on their dorsal, anal and caudal (tail) fins. Gar are one of only a few local species with the ability to gulp air to aid their breathing in oxygen deficient water, which bolsters survival in habitats with periodic episodes of oxygen depletion in the heat of summer. Longnose gar are voracious predators that survive on a diet consisting mostly of smaller fishes and may attain lengths to 6 feet.

Large spot in the 9 to 10 inch range were regularly measured during sampling in the western portion of Chesapeake Bay as well as the Rappahannock and James rivers this past month. In the Bay, the largest fish were from the mouth of Mobjack and Fleets bays. The largest spot in the Rappahannock River were taken near Totuskey Creek and in the James River near the Newport News side of the Monitor Merrimac Bridge Tunnel. Several large summer flounder were also measured southeast of Hampton Bar in the James River.

If you would like additional information about this ongoing monthly survey or to view photographs of interesting fishes please visit our website at <http://www.fisheries.vims.edu/trawlseine/mainpage.htm>